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ROBERT FRANZ

(June 28, 1815—October 24, 1892)

By HANS KLEEMANN

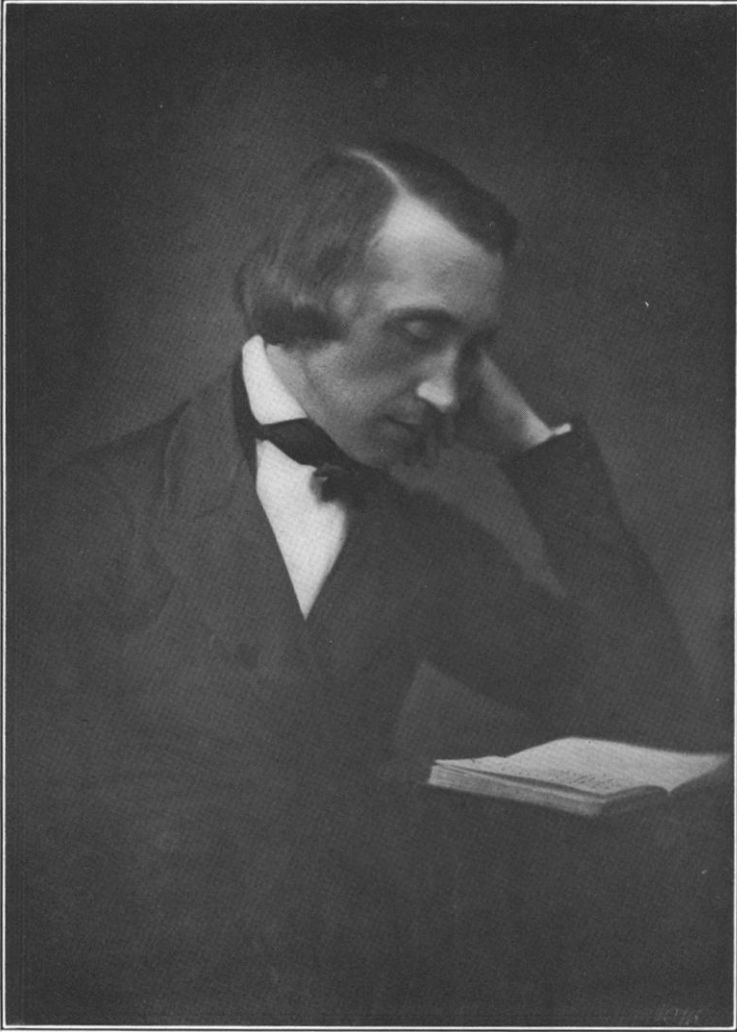
I. THE "LIEDERMEISTER"

ROBERT FRANZ gave us about 300 songs—perhaps not many if we consider that he reached the ripe age of 77 years or if we contrast his output with the endless array of songs composed by Schubert during his short career. But these 300 songs represent a great treasure, since without exception they possess artistic value. Every song in the series reveals the unmistakable idiom and genius of Franz. Their variety is astonishing, and since of all his works his songs still appeal to us most directly the artistic physiognomy of Robert Franz is best studied from them.

His "Liederhefte" appeared between 1843 and 1884 and ran from op. 1 to op. 52. In the case of Beethoven it would be fairly safe to trace his artistic development from opus to opus through (let us say) his pianoforte sonatas. Not so with Robert Franz; the date of composition coincides but rarely with the date of publication inasmuch as Franz usually accumulated many songs in his desk before selecting a few for publication. Indeed, he himself has warned us against such attempts to study his songs:

So it happened, unfortunately, that I can give no accurate account of the chronology of my compositions either to myself or to others. I never possessed vanity enough to add date and year to my songs. Some of them in my very last publications really date from between 1840 and 1845; only, they now look somewhat different. Up to my op. 8 I made radical changes when new editions were issued—thereafter I did not consider revisions necessary. (And again:) op. 1 in my opinion is neither better nor worse than op. 52.

From this estimate Franz excepted only op. 23, 27, and 33 of his "middle period." If he further held that "such working processes concern nobody but the composer," he underestimated the psychological interest of posterity and he did not take into account our natural desire for a glimpse into the privacy of the creative artist's workshop. The absence of progressive development is not necessarily something in favor of an artist. At any rate, not

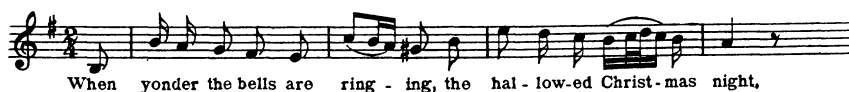


Robert Franz

to concede a difference in value between one's op. 1 and op. 52 would seem to betray a certain amount of complacency. However, it is futile to indulge in such speculations. We are confronted with facts, and back of these facts is enough of interest to warrant an attempt to unravel the threads woven into the art of song of Robert Franz.

He owed his first deep musical impressions to the Protestant Choral. But that is closely related to the German Folk-song. Therewith we have uncovered two main sources of his art. To these should be added as third his intensive study of Bach, whose mysteries few have explored more penetratingly than he. His modernism he inherited from Schubert and Schumann.

Occupation with the choral led automatically to acquaintance with the old church modes. His theoretical knowledge of them was but scant, as he himself willingly admitted. On the other hand, routine and practice made them for him means of musical expression just as natural and fluent as the modern Major and Minor. Of course we must not seek in his songs a philologically correct reproduction of medieval technique of composition. That would imply an impossibility: we moderns hear music harmonically, and we have lost contact with the medieval manner of hearing music melodically only. Nowadays the employment of the church modes produces its effect, whether intentional or not, by suggesting either an archaic flavor or merely something harmonically piquant without necessarily bringing the archaic feature to our consciousness. A case in which this archaic effect is intentional we have in the song "Es klingt in der Luft" (op. 13, 2), composed in the Phrygian mode with the explicit indication "Im alten Tone" and in the song "Wenn drüben die Glocken klingen" (op. 13, 5) the second half of the first phrase sounds exactly like a quotation from a choral.



In such instances Franz employed the church modes for a definite purpose. They are rare; much more frequently he used them unconsciously—they had become part and parcel of his technique. For instance, who would suspect reminiscences of the choral in his "The Lotosblume" (op. 1, 3)? Yet a well-known sacred hymn makes its startling appearance, if we play the accompaniment from the seventh bar on not as arpeggios but as solid chords!

Equally characteristic of his harmonies is that fluency of movement which two of his critics, Liszt and Ambros, qualified as "iridescent." Yet Liszt's and Wagner's chromatic tendencies were so foreign to his nature that he called himself an inveterate diatonic composer. For that very reason his harmonic resourcefulness is all the more remarkable. With consummate skill he knew how to vary the harmonic aspect of his music by frequent modulations into related keys (more often into those of the Third than of the Dominant) without ever obscuring the main tonality. The song "Frühling und Liebe" (op. 3, 3) is a typical example of this device: the tonality is A major with frequent modulations into F major. The same song illustrates a further and almost manneristic peculiarity of Franz, his fondness of starting proceedings with a dissonance instead of with a tonic triad. (In this particular case, the song is ushered in with the chord of the seventh *f a c e*.) Or—and this also adds zest to his harmonizations—Franz vacillates, as it were, between different keys, with the result that we are kept in the dark as to the intended tonality. Do we have E flat major or A flat minor in "Der junge Tag erwacht" (op. 7, 1); F major or B flat minor in "Wasserfarth" (op. 48, 3)? But of all his songs, in my opinion, the most "genial" harmonically is his passionate "Das ist ein Brausen und Heulen" (op. 8, 4).

There can be no question but that the fundamental quality of his songs, practically all of them strophic, is *volkstuemlich*. Hence we may see in Franz one of the last representatives of the so-called "Berliner Liederschule," with its professed demand for the *volkstuemlich* in art. Fortunately Franz eschewed exaggerated adherence to its doctrines. Mendelssohn, for instance, who belonged to the same school and had welcomed the first songs of Franz, later on found fault with him because his melodies could not be detached from his accompaniments. As a matter of fact, Franz merely allowed both to share equally in the musical interpretation of the text. However, if proof of his eminent talent for the *volkstuemlich* be desired, there may be pointed out op. 23 as an absolutely successful attempt to compose old folk-song texts or the highly artistic accompaniments for six German folk-melodies of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Ambros called Franz a "Stimmungslyriker" in contrast to Schubert, the "Situationslyriker." This distinction tells only part of the story, since Schubert does not avoid the painting of moods and Franz not the description of situations. Moreover, "situation" and "mood" may be separated in this fashion with difficulty only and in rare instances. One may point to "Bitte" (op. 9, 3) as

a song of mere "mood," but that is a rather exceptional case. As a rule, Franz does *not* neglect the so-called "Situationsmalerei," but he makes use of it to emphasize the fundamental mood of the poem. How both sometimes dovetail imperceptibly, is interestingly illustrated by his song "Du grüne Rast im Haine" (op. 41, 6). There the triolets in the accompaniment without doubt were inspired by the words "Where trees so softly *murmur*"; yet the same triolets serve later on to depict the agitation "of the heart that's pining." In fact, such tone-painting occurs in every opus, perhaps in the most subtle and artistic manner in "Ach, wenn ich doch ein Immchen wär" ("Ah, were I but a little bee") (op. 3, 6).

The most ardent and laudatory champions of Franz claim that his music reflects perfectly the spirit of every poem composed by him. More than this, they claim that one may tell from the "physiognomy" of the music the poet of the text. Intensive study of all the songs of Franz has taught me no such thing. Hugo Wolf had the unsurpassed knack of differentiating his poets, but Robert Franz had not. Be the poet Heine, Burns, Osterwald or Goethe, it is always Robert Franz and he only who speaks to us in his own characteristically individual and unmistakable style.

All his songs exhale the breath of a faint melancholy, not even those excluded that are predominantly joyous and vigorous. The "Schilf-lieder" (op. 2) are typical for this undertone of melancholy which he had in common with the poet of the texts, Lenau. Franz rarely breaks forth into such genuine joyfulness as in his "Aufbruch" (op. 35, 6) or the well-known jolly, rushing "Willkommen mein Wald" (op. 21, 1). But his habitual melancholy is not that of untalented impotence. On the contrary, his musical idiom is most convincing exactly in his vigorous songs. Take, for instance, his briskly humorous "Nun hat mein Stecken gute Rast" (op. 36, 6) or his resigned yet manly and powerful "Wiedersehen" (op. 51, 8). In fact, his originality was most conspicuous in the treatment of tragic subjects, as in the remarkable dirge in "Childe Harold" (op. 38, 3). And how simple are the harmonic means by which he produced his impressive effects:



The Neapolitan sixth at the end is another case in point. (The impression is intensified by means of the suspension.)



The accompaniments of Franz occupy the same prominence as those in the songs of Schubert and Schumann. True, he had a craving for polyphonic treatment, but not at all so frequently as many critics would have us believe. Many of his songs might easily be transcribed into simple four part harmony, and he did so himself in his op. 46 and 49. Furthermore, his strictly homophonic pianoforte accompaniments show uncommon powers of combination and variation—and he abhorred such stale formulae as the so-called Alberti basses. On the other hand, the indebtedness of his accompaniments to Schumann is proven by the above-mentioned “Frühling und Liebe” (op. 3, 3). Such figures as one notices in that song are characteristically Schumannesque, and they occur quite frequently in the songs of Franz without in the slightest degree detracting from his own power of invention. In passing, I may mention that occasionally his accompaniments, and more particularly those which include the vocal melody, permit the songs to be played as pianoforte pieces. (I suggest that the reader try the experiment with the impetuous “Rastlose Liebe” (op. 33, 6), the pearly “Die Harrende” (op. 35, 1) and “Traumlied” (op. 34, 3), which could almost pass as a Nocturne by Chopin. However, Franz did not go to extremes and he never permitted the accompaniment to choke the voice part as Schumann sometimes did.

Any attempt at critical and esthetic analysis of the songs of Franz would be incomplete without mention of the importance attached by him to the selection of the proper key. This explains his protests against transposition of his songs, for he well knew that they thereby lose in effectiveness. Not unlike Brahms, he preferred the tone of the lower strings. Consequently transposition of his songs into still lower regions too easily leads to musical ugliness. Notwithstanding the obvious and fatal results of such

transpositions, Franz frequently has been made a victim of such nonsensical procedure—all the more nonsensical and unnecessary in his case because the great majority of his songs call for a medium range of voice only. It really is about time that singers show a little more respect for the original intentions of a composer and select songs that suit their voice instead of such as they can sing only after alterations that are injurious to the composer.

II. THE APOSTLE OF BACH AND HÄNDEL.

If we see in Robert Franz primarily a composer of songs, he curiously enough at one time of his career laid less stress on his songs than on his editions of Bach and Händel. Presumably he was led to this wrong valuation by the number and volumen of his editorial works. It is safe to say that he devoted at least half of his career to them. And that at a time when the problem of how to edit old music—the so-called “Bearbeitungs-Frage”—was stirring up a lot of dust, was wasting a lot of ink and elicited many bitter remarks in the warring camps. The dispassionate verdict of posterity, given *sine ira et studio*, is that Franz fought on the wrong side. He had inherited the stubbornness of the “Hallören” from his father. Not willing to compromise, he directed the shafts of his sarcasm against the “historians” whom he considered the arch-enemies of music. On both sides the attacks became rather personal and went beyond a passionate discussion of the principles involved. After all is said, the historical party merely demanded a reconstruction of the works of Bach and Händel in the spirit of their own time. It did not really declare war on Franz personally but as a matter of principle on those who modernised improperly the orchestration of works of the early eighteenth century, and in that respect Mozart aroused their displeasure just as much as Franz. His comparative ignorance in such matters was pardonable. The history of music as a science was young and the fruits of scientific historical research were slow in attracting attention. But Franz absolutely refused to profit by the lessons of history, and that is regrettable. Otherwise some kind of amicable *modus vivendi* for both his and the opposing party might have been found.

The bone of contention in those days still was the problem of proper treatment of the “continuo” or “organo” part which the old masters, in accord with the custom of their time, wrote down either as a figured or an unfigured bass; in other words, as a mere sketch. We know to-day that the composers generally

performed that part themselves and they were so trained in the playing of "thorough-bass" that they could improvise an elaborately artistic continuo part instead of adhering to the few thin chords indicated in their sketch. And especially in the case of Bach we possess contemporary comment on his masterly powers in this art of bygone days. For instance, Mizler, Bach's pupil, says:

Whoever wishes to know the fine points of thorough-bass and how to excel in accompaniments, should hear the great J. S. Bach. He treats the thorough-bass in accompanying a solo in such a concerted manner as to create the impression that the melody of the accompaniment had been written down beforehand.

Inasmuch as this art of improvisation over a thorough-bass had become a lost art, clearly the necessity arose of working out the continuo part in detail. It is but just to concede that Franz in his editions of Bach met the situation in a sympathetic spirit. As a master of polyphony he, too, had no difficulty in avoiding meager chords, in adding flesh and life to the indicated skeleton of the bass-part and in creating works of art of substantial merit and worthy of Bach. Furthermore, Franz carefully respected the original by subduing his own personality and by utilizing for his accompaniments motives and themes found in the work itself. The champions of the historical party have not hesitated to call his editions models in that respect: in Hermann Kretzschmar's words, "there is no difference of opinion between the party of Franz and the party of Philipp Spitta with reference to the style in which the accompaniments must be elaborated." Franz did not err in such matters but in his policy of transferring the accompaniment from the organ to the instruments of a modern orchestra. Therewith he added something heterogeneous to Bach or Händel's works which possess a character of their own not merely in matters of design and line but of color. In a hundred years from now the orchestra probably will be filled with new or to us unfamiliar instruments. Would it then be right for a Franz to rearrange the orchestration of Wagner?

Additions are unobjectionable only if they serve the purpose of removing all obscurity from the unquestionable intentions of the composer. Thus we are justified in adding the higher notes of the modern flute to certain passages in the scores of Beethoven's symphonies or of his "Fidelio." Obviously Beethoven would have done so himself but for the defective range of the instrument at his disposal.

Aside from Franz's objectionable modern re-orchestration—objectionable, because it produced an unwarranted, anachronistic mixture of styles—his editions will always retain their value because of their masterly treatment of the accompaniments. For that task Robert Franz was uncommonly well equipped. Proceeding from the Protestant choral he gradually worked himself with fervor and steadily growing enthusiasm into such an intimacy with the works of Bach and Händel that they became, as it were, flesh of his flesh. He learned to speak the language of Bach as if it had been his own. Hence we feel justified in now adding to Mizler's remarks about Bach's masterly accompaniments: whoever wishes to know how to treat thorough-bass not as a dry theoretician but as a creative artist, should study the arrangements of Robert Franz. As proof of this assertion I content myself with quoting, on the hand of the vocal score made by Franz, the following from a tenor-aria in the cantata "Wer da glaubet und getauft wird." (To repeat it, the figured bass and the voice part only will be found in Bach).

Andante

Der Glau - ba ist das Pfand der Lie - be, die Je - sus - für die Seinen hegt,

mf *cresc.*

Even the severest of critics can reproach Franz with only one error of method in such arrangements. Whether in vocal or in instrumental compositions, he loves to carry the melody part, as for instance the violin and flute parts in the trio-sonata of Bach's "Musikalisches Opfer," into the accompaniment. With this habit he does not stand alone among modern editors, but it is historically wrong, since the real desideratum should be the greatest possible independence from the vocal melody in the accompaniment played by the right hand.

Nowadays we have a right to demand that the performances of works of the thorough-bass period be based as much as possible on the originals. Musicology is to-day more firmly anchored than in the days of Franz, when the fruits of scientific research were scarce. That the friction between artists and historians persists,

though coöperation has become so feasible, is regrettable enough. It is still a frequent occurrence that the one eyes the other askance and sees in him an hereditary enemy. For all concerned it would be better if they learned to profit from each other's experiences. On the one hand the artist should acquire a fair amount of sound historical knowledge; on the other the musicologist should acquire a mastery of musical technique far beyond the ability to play the piano moderately well. Franz, too, could have spared himself many a bitter hour, had he been less one-sided in his partisanship. "Historian" from his mouth meant the same as "pedant"—at any rate, something derogatory. It proved to be the tragedy of his life that he *would* not admit the right of existence of historical research and that he obstinately adhered to doomed principles. The whole bitter (and often personal) controversy ended with the acceptance of the demands of the historical party, known in Germany as the "Renaissance-movement."

Notwithstanding Franz's anti-historical attitude, the revival of Bach and Händel owes much to him because he undermined the growing and absurd tendency to perform their works without additions and elaborations of any kind. The public really could not be expected to derive pleasure from such performances of the old masters; the public quite naturally wondered at their "primitiveness" and felt bored. Indeed, even to-day the race of pianists is not extinct who will play two-part compositions by Bach as notated without suspecting that they require the addition of middle-voices. Happily that sort of thing is practically obsolete in the performance of his choral works, and as early as 1872 Franz, after a performance of Händel's "Allegro," could write to his friend Osterwald: "In the future nobody will dare to give works of Bach and Händel again at Halle without first arranging and editing them."

III. THE CONDUCTOR

A survey of Franz's career as conductor involves a survey of the history of the "Singakademie" at Halle. Though founded in 1833, this institution owes its brilliant reputation really to Franz. In graceful recognition of this fact it now bears the proud name "Robert Franz-Singakademie." Franz made his *début* as conductor of the society on December 12, 1842, and he remained loyal to it for twenty-five years.

When Franz took charge of the Singakademie it was facing a crisis. Under Simon Georg Schmidt, an excellent violinist of the Spohr school, the institution had gained in reputation and

importance and had weathered several dangerous storms. But in 1841 Schmidt accepted a call to Bremen; and without his strong, guiding hand the society threatened to collapse, partly because many withdrew from the society who had remained loyal only on Schmidt's account. His successor Erlanger did his best to restore sound conditions, but decided to leave Halle soon afterwards.

In this crisis a man appeared who was willing and strong enough to make of the Singakademie what it had been formerly—a society for the cultivation of serious music. This man was Robert Franz.

Several things qualified him for the position. He was in sympathy with the tradition of the Schmidt era to give to Bach and Händel a place of honor on the programs and he was a member of the private musical club of Halle that followed the example set by Thibaut's circle at Heidelberg, and emphasized the cultivation of old Italian and old German music. It so happened that the singing pupils of Franz belonged to this club. Gradually all of these ladies joined the Singakademie and thereby injected fresh life into the society.

The very first public announcements of Franz's activity gave a clear view of his ambitious goal. He announced a series of subscription concerts; the best proof of his intentions to reform thoroughly the Singakademie, which had slowly drifted into musical provincialism with no higher ideals than superficial amusement. Franz, though absolutely untaught as a conductor, must have felt pretty sure of his powers, for he promised "model performances." Irritated by such self-conscious language the critic Nauenburg took issue with him and declared that nobody was justified in making such advance promises. For the honor of Nauenburg be it said that he soon withdrew his strictures and recognized fully the artistic ability of Franz. More than that, he was the first to sing songs by Franz in public.

The program of Franz's first concert comprised only smaller works such as Mendelssohn's symphony-cantata "Lobgesang." By 1844 he had ventured upon the performance of an entire oratorio, Händel's "Judas Maccabaeus." But it took years of hard work and it taxed all his energies before he aroused the public definitely from its indifference. The main objection to him seems to have been what was called his one-sided Bach-cult. As a matter of fact, he championed the "Moderns," especially Schumann and Mendelssohn, just as energetically. But Franz was too much of an idealist to be discouraged by obstacles, and this idealism went so far that he neither asked for nor received

a salary. (Not until 1851 did he receive the modest honorarium of 50 thaler in recognition of his services, changed in 1854 to a fixed salary. Another 50 thaler were added after the eventful year 1857 as a "small token of esteem" and henceforth regularly every year until the finances of the society permitted it to double the sum in 1860. Two years later his salary was increased to 200 Thaler.) Unfavorable social and political conditions contributed to a retardation of the development of the city's artistic interests. Hence things moved but slowly in spite of Franz's industry and enthusiasm and his auspicious start. Worst of all, the members could not be made to attend rehearsals regularly. This state of affairs led in 1849 to a complete reorganization of the Singakademie; it now separated itself completely from the "Musik-Verein" together with which it had been founded in 1833.

The year 1856 brought a revolution at last. The plan was conceived in Halle to erect a monument to the great son of the city, Georg Friedrich Händel, and it became incumbent upon the promoters of the plan to arouse the interest of the whole musical world. They issued a public appeal and the Singakademie took the first step to bring the plan to fruition. On March 6, 1856, it performed Händel's "Samson" and on March 19, 1857, the "Messiah" in a performance that attracted wide attention. The success was still more emphatic when the performance was repeated in the Marktkirche on December 15, a gala-day in the career of the Singakademie and its conductor. The event partook of the nature of a music festival through the participation of a star of first magnitude, Jenny Lind. At one blow Halle had regained the former reputation as a musical city. Other cities emulated the example set and gave Händel concerts. The Händel monument committee had every reason to express its gratitude to master Franz in a very warm and appreciative letter.

The next year continued brilliant and then came the centenary of Händel's death in 1759. Heidel's monument was unveiled on July 1 with appropriate ceremonies to which Franz contributed a festival performance of "Samson" with Tichatschek of Tannhäuser fame among the soloists, with Ferdinand David the violinist, Julius Rietz and Friedrich Grützmacher, the violoncellists, in the orchestra and Franz Liszt, Eduard Lassen and Ignaz Moscheles in the audience.

It was an amazingly fruitful year, indeed, in Franz's career as a conductor: Händel's "Samson" and "Jephtha," Schumann's "Faust" and "Peri," for the Schiller centenary Romberg's "Lied von der Glocke," Mendelssohn's "Festgesang an die Künstler"

and Cherubini's "Requiem." The battle was won. The members of the society were enthusiastic; so was the public. With proud satisfaction Franz could (1863) write to his friend Senfft von Pilsach: "The Singakademie is again *in floribus*."

But a tragic fate had decreed that Franz was to enjoy such inspiring coöperation with his forces for a few years only. As early as 1848 the shrill whistle of an engine had affected his hearing (at least this was Franz's own explanation) and his ear-trouble now led rapidly to deafness. On February 19, 1867, he conducted a rehearsal of Händel's "Feast of Alexander," and then relinquished the baton forever. To thus take leave from the Singakademie after he had spent a good part of his life to make the institution flourish was not an easy matter. The loss of the sense of hearing and the resulting psychic depression threatened to affect his mind, but he emerged from the catastrophe as a conquering hero. Until his death he watched the future vicissitudes of *his* Singakademie with increasing interest and gave loyal counsel.

The qualities that distinguished Franz as a conductor were, in addition to versatility and culture, an intimate knowledge of the works of the masters, and based thereon the ability to impart his enthusiasm to others by opening their eyes to hidden beauties. He was in no sense a virtuoso conductor of the modern type. The effect he made on the public interested him not at all. He never rehearsed the individual parts; he expected them to be studied at home and therein he seldom had ground for complaint. He laid considerable stress in rehearsals on making the mood of the composition absolutely clear—not by means of dry analysis but of pointed poetic comparisons. Even the members of the orchestra he sought by such explanatory remarks to educate up to an artistically intelligent interpretation. How his whole heart went into the rehearsals is illustrated by the following story told to Procházka, his biographer, by the court virtuoso Theodor Winkler of Weimar: "If a composition interested Franz more than ordinarily, he would address an analytical speech to the orchestra before starting the rehearsal, and often he would shed tears of anticipatory emotion."

For Franz music was not a matter of technique nor an amusement to pass away the time, but a means for education and culture. This conception of the functions of music H. Abert has paraphrased tellingly in the following words:

Franz looked upon music as the prophetess of the highest ethical ideals, as a language in tones of emotions that are not expressible in words. His ideas of music partook of the Hellenic conception that the

contemplation of beauty fosters the knowledge of good. To guide his associates into this world of ideals he considered to be his highest duty as conductor of the Academy. He sought to impart his own inner experiences to every member of his chorus in the hope that, according to individual capacity, they would absorb them as a permanent possession.

And he succeeded: for whoever sang under him, had been trained not to hear music just with the ear but to let heart and mind vibrate sympathetically. One therefore understands why the former members of his chorus hark back to those unforgettable, beautiful times with enthusiastic gratitude.

IV. "KÜNSTLERS ERDENWALLEN"

Not far from Leipzig, in the old salt-city Halle a. d. Saale, the remnants of a caste, that once enjoyed important privileges, survive: the "Halleoren." The name implies that they plied the trade of salt-refiners, and they continue to do so though they have lost their former importance. Our Lieder-master Robert Franz came of such Halleoren-stock. Originally named Knauth—a frequent Halleoren-name—his father changed it to *Franz* because frequent confusion with his brother had for a time led to enmity between the two. This explanation should set at rest the legend that Robert Franz chose the name to indicate spiritual kinship with his two great predecessors, Franz Schubert and Robert Schumann. "Robert Franz," then, is a mere coincidence, and he resented the legend all the more because such stupid vanity was entirely foreign to his character. Still more phantastic is the notion that Franz's father bethought himself of such prescient symbolism when he adopted the name. (At the time of his marriage in 1848, Robert Franz received Royal confirmation of his right to use the name.)

Early home-surroundings of Franz were not of a kind to foreshadow an artist's career. We need not take too seriously his one-time remark that his father was an "avowed enemy of music"; the Halleoren-tradition simply was against music as a profession. They rejoiced if their sons took to the cloth but they held "breadless arts" in disdain. Old Christoph Franz was in reality fond of music, and his son in later years remembered the pleasure with which he listened to the singing of his father. After the day's work he would sing with considerable skill some of his favorite hymns from the "Freylinghausen'sche Gesangbuch." His musical reliability was recognized in church for it was he who led in the congregational singing. This, then, was well-prepared soil for rooting Franz's predilection for the choral.

His earliest vague musical recollections he traced to the celebration of the Reformation in 1817:

In Halle, too, the event was splendidly celebrated. As if in a dream I still hear the tones of the trombone choirs wafted down upon us from the Hausmanns-towers of our Haupt- and Stadtkirche. That they had played Luther's immortal "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott" I, of course, learned only subsequently.

The date of the event is easily fixed as October 31, 1817, when Franz, who was born on June 18, 1815, was not yet three years of age.

The first impetus to create music of his own he received at school during singing lessons. He could not resist the temptation to add a second part to the songs sung there unisono. His reward was severe punishment by a teacher whose pedagogic light shone none too bright and who did not appreciate that kind of thing.

The boy's musical inclinations manifested themselves more and more and they found a first echo in his mother's heart. Her entreaties finally prevailed and the father allowed an instrument to enter the house. Though it was but a miserable spinet, yet it enabled the boy to "try his own fists at music." These attempts at self-instruction were followed by regular music lessons, poor enough in the Halle of those days. In four years the boy had learned all that the available teachers could teach him and he found much more enjoyment in "making" music with congenial friends. Again the choral figured prominently in these diversions and since the organ had come to fascinate him as much as his spinet, he would hasten on Sundays from one church to the other to play on this or that organ a choral verse.

This more or less unregulated musical activity gave way to methodical progress when he became a student at the Gymnasium, called "Franke'sche Stiftung." He joined the singing classes of the Cantor Karl Gottlob Abela, who combined love for his profession with love for the divine art and who made it a point to further his most talented pupils in the privacy of his home, beyond the limited opportunities offered at school. He would acquaint them with the oratorios of Händel, Haydn and Mozart. Their art now took full possession of young Franz. Abela was quick to perceive his pupil's uncommon musical gifts. It was he who gave solidity to his pianoforte technique, and it was a proud day for Franz when his teacher entrusted him with the pianoforte accompaniments during chorus rehearsals.

The more he busied himself with music, the more enthusiastically he initiated himself in the art's mysteries, the less his creative instincts and desires could be restrained. Without an indispensable theoretical background he was, of course, merely groping about in the dark, though these creative efforts proved at least the necessity for him to express his innermost thoughts in music. The time devoted to these efforts aroused the displeasure of his parents, particularly of his father. Domestic friction increased with the ripening of Franz's conviction that music alone could fill his life. Just at that time two of his fellow-students had received the parental permission to embrace music as a profession. We cannot help smiling at the excited discussions produced in the little town by this step. Needless to say, it was generally condemned.

Happily for Franz, the obstacles to his wishes were removed and the dangers of mental breakdown from fruitless domestic quarrels were averted through the influence of his distant relation Dr. Erich, the first pastor of St. Ulric's. He had repeatedly listened to the youth's organ improvisations, and he realized that here was undeniable talent seeking for a proper outlet. Thanks to his diplomacy, Franz's father at last relented and consented.

The promised land in sight at last! Without finishing his studies at the Gymnasium, Franz—now twenty years of age—went to Dessau in the hope of learning music's deepest secrets from Friedrich Schneider, then a celebrity of the first water. To-day even his oratorio "Das Weltgericht," once performed everywhere, is known only by title from the text-books of musical history. Schneider was an excellent theoretician and a master of all the tricks of counterpoint. Hence the young pilgrim from Halle entered Schneider's conservatory at Dessau with the reasonable expectation of acquiring what he absolutely lacked: systematic order in the chaos of his musical knowledge. Schneider put him to the usual school-exercises and countenanced no deviation from the rules in solving these musical problems. That was not at all to the taste of the young fire-brand, who was bent on real deeds. Unable to bridle his imagination time and again he smuggled ideas of his own into his exercises. But such expressions of originality and individuality did not escape Schneider's watchfully critical eyes and he made short shrift of these exceptions to his rules. Against this method Franz rebelled, and pretty soon the relations between teacher and pupil became unbearable. In less than two years Franz bid adieu to Dessau; without regret, for he

had quite enough of the spirit of pedantry—as he then looked upon it. On the other hand, Schneider had the firm conviction that Franz would never amount to anything. In later years both men came to modify their opinion of each other. Schneider lived to see Franz famous as a composer of songs and he in turn came to appreciate the debt of gratitude he owed to Schneider's strict training. In 1892, in a letter to his son, the choirmaster Theodor Schneider of Chemnitz, Franz confessed:

It gives me great pleasure to have gotten into musical contact with the youngest son of my old teacher. I shall never forget how much of my skill in different forms I owe to your father. The value of his teachings becomes more and more apparent. Maybe that subsequently I underwent other influences, but the foundation of my artistic technique assuredly was laid at Dessau.

It is curious to note, by the way, how at Dessau his predilection for the Protestant choral had met once more with congenial response. He says of his friend Reupsch: "He played nothing but chorals, though so wonderfully that he made me forget Schneider and his stuff."

His return to Halle was greeted with rebukes from his relatives. They saw in the abrupt termination of his studies but a proof of mistaken judgment in his musical talents. Quite different his reception by the small circle of music lovers of whom mention was made above. With these congenial friends he shared the conviction of the high ethical mission of music, and before long he was recognized as the leading spirit of this little group, among them his former chum and favorite poet—I mean Wilhelm Osterwald. Franz in the course of the years felt inspired to compose many of Osterwald's poems, but he in turn inspired his friend for the writing of quite a few of these poems by his improvisations at the pianoforte. It was Osterwald who made the "fluent, soaring translations" of 36 Händel arias for Franz.

For the next five years Franz remained unproductive. During these years he again absorbed the art of Bach and Händel and he came under the spell of the more modern masters, especially Schubert and Schumann. They opened of a sudden his eyes to the barren futility of his experiments in composition made behind the back of his teacher in Dessau. Indeed, at times he seriously doubted his creative talents, but this dissatisfaction with himself—so necessary in an artist—proved a blessing in disguise: This period of abstinence from creative efforts allowed his mind to mature. Thus these five years were not lost; they enriched him by a thorough insight into the art of his great forerunners.

In a retrospective mood he once formulated an analysis of this evolutionary process, as follows:

It was only later on in Halle that I saw light, understood the essence of art and found "foreign matter" to be merely a means to an end. The sincerity of my newly gained convictions produced in me for five years apparent sterility: Bach and Händel on the one hand, Schubert and Schumann on the other effectively made me "shut up." Once this process of fermentation by way of healthful assimilation had run its course, the old desire to compose reappeared—but in a manner essentially different from that of my former groping experiments. I ceased to compose mechanically and I began to heed the inner impulse. It was a blessing for my development as a composer that I had occupied myself so passionately *a tempo* with Bach, Händel, Schubert and Schumann because this combination led to a fairly satisfactory amalgamation of these *so closely* related elements.

As in Schumann's case, so in that of Franz, love—"Louise G."—pressed the lyre into his hands. Nor would Franz of his own accord hardly have decided so soon to unfold to the public eye the treasures of song accumulating in his desk. His friends banished his scruples. He selected some of his songs and sent them to Schumann. With a success far exceeding his boldest hopes: Schumann not merely praised the songs but unasked found a publisher for these first fruits of Franz's Muse. The first step toward immortality had been taken. And it was not vainglorious complacency that prompted Franz to report his success to a friend on July 18, 1843:

In the course of the last half year I have become a composer. How it has happened, I do not know. This much is certain: practically one song a day. Just imagine what a harvest that may lead to. The people have put it into my head that my songs are good. I doubted that and forwarded some of them to Schumann. He has now completely turned my head. Without my knowledge and without my request he has given my songs to a publisher and they have been printed. Just think of it: Songs by Franz, etc. All the corner-stones are laughing with jubilant enthusiasm! To attempt to tell you all the nice and flattering experiences with my songs would smack too much of vanity. But one thing I cannot repress for joy: *Mendelssohn* has written me a long letter and has said things to me that certainly are not said to many. He is full of pleasure and amiability.

To be praised simultaneously and from the start by two shining lights in music meant double satisfaction for him who had been misjudged so often. Schumann's criticism of Franz's opus 1 in the "*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*" is still worth reading as it clearly sets forth the vital differences between the easy-going

methods of song composers at and before the time of Beethoven and of the later masters of song, including Franz.

Only Chopin and Brahms received from Schumann such a brilliant introduction to the world of music as did Franz. It helped incidentally to better the financial status of Franz, who was satisfied with little and never succeeded in accumulating riches. Also Dr. Erich had again lent a helping hand and had procured for him the post of organist at St. Ulric's. (The document of appointment is dated August 15, 1841, and is still in possession of the family.) In the following year we see Franz at the head of the Singakademie, and through the friendly efforts of Julius Schäffer, subsequently director of music at the University of Breslau, he succeeded Naue as assistant-conductor of the "Akademische Liedertafel." Schäffer, at the time a student of theology and philosophy at Halle, became one of Franz's most loyal followers and never missed an opportunity to fight for the cause of his friend.

Franz substituted for Naue, the former director of music at the University of Halle, in other directions, too, until officially confirmed in 1859 as his successor. A trip to Vienna in 1846 brought him into personal contact with Liszt, who immediately welcomed him as "congenial." The hearty reception and the intelligent appreciation of his artistic endeavors by the Viennese, made his trip to the old "Kaiserstadt" an ever-memorable event in his life. In particular Liszt, always ready to encourage real talent, volunteered assistance. He saw to the publication of Franz's opus 9 and the four hand pianoforte arrangement of Schubert's D minor quartet.

In 1848 Franz's material prospects permitted him to marry, not "Luise G.," the young lady who had inspired his first song cycles, but Maria Hinrichs, the daughter of the philosopher. Into their bliss there sounded shortly afterwards that fatally shrill whistle of an engine. For days Franz was deaf, and until his hearing returned a sensation as of a noisy torrent tormented his ears. The higher tones had dropped from his aural perception forever, and gradually in the course of twenty years they were followed by tone after tone of the entire range.

In addition to this terrible affliction, we know how Franz had to surmount various difficulties that beset his path towards recognition in Halle, whereas outside of his home city appreciation of his work steadily increased. This situation applied both to his songs and his editorial work in the interest of a fitting revival of the master works of Bach and Händel. The sixties were devoted

principally to these editorial labors and in a spirit of resignation Franz saw his "Neuausgaben" spread through foreign countries faster than through Germany.

How the year 1856 brought with it a new era for him has been told in the third chapter. I merely add here that the University of Halle conferred on him the honorary degree of Dr. The King honored his propaganda for Bach and Händel in 1867 by a yearly stipend of 200 thaler—cancelled ten years later through the machinations of envious enemies. Nor need Americans be told that America was among the first to give due credit to the songs of Franz. Nor how Otto Dresel championed Franz in his song-recitals. Indeed, as early as 1865 songs of Franz were published in America with English texts. Two years later a benefit for the composer at Boston netted 2000 thaler—a substantial proof of his growing popularity.

In the meantime his ear trouble had assumed a serious aspect. He gave touching expression to the hopelessness of his condition in his correspondence of those years. The catastrophe soon followed: total deafness compelled the master early in 1867 to withdraw from public life. And again darkness fell upon him, for he was by no means so situated financially as yet that he could spend the rest of his life in a *dolce far niente*. In this crisis the true friends of his art, and they were many, rallied around him. Acting on a suggestion from Franz's publisher Constantin Sander, a committee was formed to consider ways and means for offering to the master an honorary donation sufficiently large to remove all worry about the future from his mind. Baron Arnold Senfft von Pilsach was the chairman, assisted by men of renown, as for instance Franz Liszt and Minister Baron von Keudell. Men of literary fame responded to the call and concentrated the attention of the musical world upon the deaf master of song. Everywhere in Germany Franz-concerts were given with the active participation of such "stars" as Joseph and Amalie Joachim and Eugen Gura. Vienna also came to the fore and in America men like Osgood seconded the efforts of Dresel. Thus the committee could present to Robert Franz on June 28, 1873, his fifty-eighth birthday, a love-offering of 30,000 thaler.

Refreshed by all this, Franz now published several cycles selected from earlier, unpublished compositions which he retouched for the occasion. Op. 52 of 1884, "dedicated to his dear children Lisbeth and Richard," was *his* last love-offering. The preceding opus he dedicated to King Ludwig of Bavaria in thankful appreciation of the Order of Maximilian. In the Händel-year 1885

Halle made him an honorary citizen and on the occasion of his seventieth birthday tokens of respect and admiration reached him from the four corners of the earth.

Honored and loved, free from care, he could spend the evenings of his life in contemplation of a rich harvest of accomplishment. The loss of dear friends, Liszt, Osterwald and Dresel, and of his loyal wife (1891) poured a last drop of bitterness into his cup. On October 24, 1892, he followed them to eternal rest.

V. THE MAN

Robert Franz, the man, possessed many sterling characteristics, chief of them his sincerity of purpose. He would defend his opinions, even obviously wrong opinions, with stubbornness, because they expressed his innermost convictions. That atones for the many rough and tough utterances to be found in his letters. He applied not always exactly parliamentary language to his opponents. But Franz never dreamed of seeing his letters published! As his deafness grew from bad to worse, he saw himself more and more obliged to take refuge to the written word as a means of communication. And so he "spoke" on paper with the same nonchalant and exaggerated freedom of vocabulary as others do in conversation. That the written or printed word often sounds harsher than intended, we all know.

Just as his songs are introspective rather than outwardly brilliant and just as his conducting aimed more at intelligent coöperation of his singers than at brilliancy of effect in concert-performance, so his whole personality shrank from occupying the center of the stage. Nor does his voluminous activity as an editor contradict this, since we know from numerous remarks of his that he considered himself always and primarily the *servant* of Bach and Händel.

How it went against his grain to be dragged into party-strife and to be forced into the rôle of a pope of music, may be illustrated by his attitude toward Wagner. At first he based his estimate of him (and it was not favorable) on "opinions emanating from the Mendelssohn and Schumann clique." He revised it completely after hearing the memorable première of "Lohengrin" at Weimar (1850) under Liszt, and he wrote a letter to this effect to Max Waldau (*pseud.* of Spiller von Hauenschild). Whereupon Waldau published the letter without divulging the name of the writer. This did not prevent the authorship from becoming known at Weimar, but when the Wagner-party, through Hans v. Bülow,

requested permission to inscribe his name, as it were, on their banner, Franz promptly refused. Not until Liszt, to whom he felt under obligations, urged him, did he consent. And so Franz, really against his will, was dragged onto the firing line and he had occasion to regret the step for a good many years afterwards.

That a man with his introspective tendencies attached little importance to externals was but natural. He was the very opposite of a dandy—"dress-suit and silk-hat" he scorned and hated. This indifference to sartorial conventions would put him occasionally in an awkward position, because frequently nobody expected in him the celebrated Robert Franz. But such experiences he submitted to with good humor.

One of his contemporaries, Theodor Held, has recorded this vivid and reliable pen-picture of Franz's appearance:

Franz arose. Lean, fairly tall and sinewy, he moved forward with a stoop and with nervous restlessness as if otherwise he might not reach his goal. His free and slightly receding forehead, his prominent eyebrows and his long, pointed nose made an impressive combination. His blue eyes had a kindly and arch expression. The whole picture was framed by dark, closely brushed hair, which did not turn to grey until his very last years. Beardless he went through the world. He spoke rapidly but clearly, with a slight lisp and among intimate friends almost in the jargon of Halle which, sung, approaches closely to the dialect of Meissen.

The photograph accompanying this essay, Franz's son-in-law Superintendent Bethge told me, is one of the most characteristic and best.

Though Franz was of a retiring disposition and disliked the noise of the world, he was by no means a philistine or crank. He was constantly adding to his fund of knowledge and the study of belles-lettres was a source of purest delight to him. Even politics attracted him, though he did not appear in public as a political orator or leader. This interest in politics was fostered by the circle of his friends, who watched political events with close attention, and in politics Franz was always a pronounced Progressive.

Without the manners of a man of the world like Liszt and without the faculty to make people talk about him, he needed more time than others to attract attention and to gain recognition. Once it was gained by dint of his music, his soul was filled with joy and gratitude and he required but a modicum of appreciation to feel happy. It was characteristic of him in this respect that the memory of those beautiful days at Vienna (1846) was indelibly

associated with the memory of the “many, genuine Havanas” smoked there at Liszt’s. Indeed, smoking was one of the few pleasures that he did not like to deny himself.

All in all, Franz was intensely human and nothing human was foreign to him. But above all an idealistic enthusiasm for the beautiful—with him just another word for the good and true—glorified his personality and made it so harmonious. And certainly it is in keeping with these ideals of the master, if we now take leave of him with the words of Keats:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

(Translated by Frank Lester).